"LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS" AND CLARIFICATION OF TERMS AS TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING " THINGS THEMSELVES"

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Can phenomenology positively relate to linguistic analysis, or does it ignore language in an abstract "seeing" of "things themselves"? Does it radically differ from analytic philosophy, or is it just a brand of it? A great obstacle to genuinely going back to things themselves lies in misleading terms, which often fail to refer clearly to a given datum because they are equivocal and ambiguous. When an author uses such terms as if they were unequivocal, he tends to melt many conceptual meanings into "one" ambiguous notion and thus confuse fundamentally distinct questions and issues. The uncritical use of equivocal notions is undoubtedly among the most frequent sources of philosophical errors, as Balduin Schwarz and others have shown. Thus analysis of linguistic meanings and usages of terms has the critical task of uncovering linguistically motivated confusions and errors. [1]

On the other hand, language and the distinctions it suggests may constitute a positive inspiration for the philosophical exploration of the given. These two aspects of linguistic analysis should be explained, at least briefly.

In order to avoid the philosophical errors and confusions that result from the use of linguistic expressions, the different meanings that remain undistinguished, or which employ equivocal terms in defense of erroneous or confused theses, the phenomenologist must *also* be a linguistic analyst. Of course, this term is not used here to designate a specific empiricist philosophical position which is usually what is meant by the name "analytic philosophy." However, it is simply an expression of the activity every good philosopher should engage in careful listening to any wisdom and knowledge about the given which language can teach us.

Let us illustrate this point by means of some examples of important philosophical issues. When discussing such issues as the possibility of knowing "things in themselves" *(noúmena)* or the objectivity versus the alleged subjectivity of all human knowledge, the philosopher needs to distinguish the radically different meanings these terms can have. Alternatively, again, without

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[1] See Balduin Schwarz, *The Role of Linguistic Analysis* (Washington DC, 1960). See also Balduin Schwarz, *Das Problem des Irrtums in der Philosophie* (Münster, Aschaffenburg, 1934); Josef Seifert, Stephen D. Schwarz und Wolfram Schrems (Ed.), Balduin Schwarz, *Der Irrtum in der Philosophie*. 2e Aufl., (Unveränderter Neudruck der ersten Aufl., mit einer neuen Einleitung der Herausgeber, drei späteren Aufsätzen von Balduin Schwarz zum Irrtumsproblem und Schriften Nicolai Hartmanns und Josef Seiferts über das Buch von Schwarz). *Realistische Phänomenologische Philosophie.* Philosophische Studien des Dietrich von Hildebrand Lehrstuhls an der Internationalen Akademie für Philosophie – Instituto de Filosofía Edith Stein Granada. Hrsg. Josef Seifert. Bd. III. Kindle Independent Publishing, 2015. http://www.amazon.com/dp/B015GHM4OQ.

distinguishing the diverse meanings of terms like "being," "is," "opposite," "transcendence," "immanence," "dualism," "dogmatism," "idealism," and so forth, the attempt to gain clarity about the fundamental issues of epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophical anthropology will be a hopeless undertaking. There are, of course, thinkers from all periods of the history of philosophy, examples of outstanding analyses of different meanings of terms that contributed greatly to clarifying and solving philosophical problems. There is no need here to reproduce the distinctions concerning freedom, necessity, and chance which Aristotle makes in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Physics* and Augustine in *De Libero Arbitrio* and *De Civitate Dei* or to develop other concrete examples which demonstrate the fundamental significance of terminological clarifications for the philosophical elucidation of the respective issues themselves. The reader will be acquainted with the immense role of the terminological distinctions between radically different meanings of terms such as "thinking" (thought), "judgment," "*Vorstellung*," "content of consciousness," "necessity of thinking," etc. have played in the phenomenological clarification of the subject matter of logic (think of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* or Alexander Pfänder's *Logik*) and of epistemology.[2]

The critical importance of such terminological clarifications is elucidated by reference to the fact that thoughtless or at least not sufficiently thoughtful application of, and operation with, ambiguous terms is undoubtedly one major obstacle to philosophical knowledge, whether equivocations are used sophistically to deceive others or are uncritically accepted. In either case, using ambiguous terms, the different meanings of which are not distinguished, leads to great confusion.

A semi-conscious or intentional use of equivocations is found in the great number of catchwords and slogans which discredit things endowed with value by presenting them in the light of bad things or in those catchwords which endow trivial or bad things with the glory of positive phenomena to which the same term can refer. As an example of the former tendency, consider the catchword "dogmatism." This term may be used to suggest that any objectivist philosophy about things themselves (about the *noúmena)* is nothing but an unreasoned and uncritical intellectual attachment to blindly held prejudices or that the same philosophy is a pure outgrowth of a fanatic imposition of one's own subjective views on others. Such catchwords are enemies to true philosophy and knowledge of reality because they identify radically different phenomena (in our case, fanaticism of attitude and violation of other people's freedom, objectivist philosophy, and an uncritical spirit) without undertaking the least attempt to demonstrate the justification of such an identification.

The opposite form of abusing equivocal words could be illustrated by the use of adjectives and names which endow a position such as skepticism or subjective idealism with the glory of the predicate "critical," without even taking the trouble of showing that the position thus designated (for example, Kant's "critical philosophy") deserves such an excellent predicate.

Unfortunately, the use of slogans and catchwords is not restricted to the

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[2] See Alexander Pfänder, *Logik* (Tübingen: Ambrosius Barth/M. Niemeyer, ^{3}1963); (Mariano Crespo, Hg.), *Logik*, 4. Auflage, Bd. 10, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Carl Winter, 2000); *Logic*, trans. Donald Ferrari, (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2008).

sphere of politics, rhetoric, and popular theological discussion, where slogans such as "modern," "progressive," "traditional," or "conservative" are consistently used with great art to convey impressions and evaluations which are effective, however far removed from reality they may be. The use of equivocal terms also plays an enormous role in philosophical and pseudo-philosophical sophistical discussions and arguments.

There are still more dangerous equivocations than those involved in catchwords and slogans, whether these be used in philosophical or extra-philosophical discourse. The equivocations I mean are found on a far higher intellectual level and are less "tendentious" than catchwords. In what follows, it will be shown that the systems of such great philosophers as Kant and Husserl are by no means free from radically equivocal terms and from the pernicious intellectual effects that the employment of such terms, the different meanings of which are not distinguished, has for the philosophical discussion. It certainly has to be regarded as an important task of any phenomenological analysis to remove such linguistic and terminological obstacles to going "back to things themselves."

Far be it from us, however, to attribute to linguistic analysis a mere 'negative' task, or better, only the eminently positive task, of freeing us from negative phenomena: from real and potential confusions and errors which result from the ambiguous use of language in a given author or common ordinary language. There is also a second and purely 'positive' role exercised by the tool of linguistic analysis. Frequently, a positive philosophical grasp of a thing is mediated by the analysis of linguistic meanings and nuances of meaning. Delving into the various semantic or syntactic meanings of linguistic formations or the role of a common root or ending in many words and word families often allows the attentive thinker to discern many things he would not have noticed without drawing on the wisdom embodied in language. Likewise, comparative linguistic analyses may be very helpful in this context.

Take, for example, the study of the difference in meaning of three related Latin terms in the service of a philosophy of permission and in the service of the same type of phenomenological analysis which Edmund Husserl conducted in the *Logical Investigations,* and Alexander Pfänder in his *Logik:* they distinguished thought as the activity of thinking (psychic datum of thinking), thought as the result or objectified expression of this activity, with which logic is concerned and which has a universal character, and regarding which we discover necessary ideal structures quite distinct from the psychological acts of thinking, and, finally, 'thought' in the sense of that which is thought about - the states of affairs and objects to which our thought refers. Such distinctions overcame the psychologism and relativism into which one will inevitably fall when one fails to attend to those differences.

In a lecture presented at The International Academy of Philosophy,[3] William

[3] I refer to the *International Academy of Philosophy* in Irving, Texas, founded in 1980 and preceded the *Internationale Akademie für Philosophie im Fürstentum Liechtenstein*, founded in 1986. Both shared the same fundamental ideas and founders but were distinct entities. For example, the International Academy of Philosophy Press was part of the IAP in Irving, Texas, has never been used by The International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality of Liechtenstein, but has resumed its activity in 2015, publishing the series *Realistische Phänomenologische Philosophie/Realist Phenomenological Philosophy.*

Marra, Jr. gave linguistic hints for quite similar distinctions made by the ordinary Latin language. The term *permissus,* for example, refers to the activity of permitting, to permission as the act of the proper authority which allows something. This *permissus* differs from the *permissio,* which means the fruit of such an act, the permission as such, which could be compared to the proposition (judgment) asserted by the act of judging (which can be true or false and which is different from the act of making a judgment). Similarly, the *permissio* is different from the act of permitting in that it can still exist after that act ceases to exist or even after the person who gave permission has died. Different from both the *permissus* and the *permissio* is the *permissum*, i.e., the activity permitted and can legitimately be performed after it was permitted by the one to whom permission was given.

Without extending this analysis any further, we can see that the differences between the different phenomena of *permissus, permissio,* and *permissum* will most likely be overlooked by the philosopher who ignores the complexities and refinements of meaning which are reflected in language, and specifically the semantic differences between words of the same root which roughly have the same meaning and which can, in our case, be rendered by the same word in English ("permission") or in German ("*Erlaubnis*").

For the phenomenological philosopher in particular, a careful analysis of multifarious word meanings is, however, not a goal in itself. It is equally true for the case in which it is not a matter of investigating meanings of isolated words but in which the meaning of various complex linguistic data is examined: of syntactic rules and constructions, but also of proverbs and colloquial expressions which deal with love, time, and so forth. The wisdom of language, common sense, and popular sayings can be fruitful for philosophy. Regarding such common expressions, of course, the philosopher must be highly critical and appropriate only those which contain authentic wisdom about things. He has to liberate himself from prejudices that are expressed in common-sensical expressions.

Much can also be gained philosophically from linguistic analyses of those unwritten rules of linguistic usage which forbid the employment of statements, the legitimacy of which would follow from certain erroneous philosophical theories. There is, as it were, a pre-philosophical contact with the essence of things that governs linguistic sensibilities and permits some expressions while forbidding others the use of which would give rise to linguistic and philosophical absurdities. This aspect of language is philosophically much more reliable and important than 'words of wisdom' and proverbial or colloquial statements. It is so because the less theoretical and more reality-formed contact with things which is reflected in the rules that determine which expressions are acceptable and which are not is usually a faithful embodiment of man's actual experience of things. A critical or 'negative' use of this aspect of linguistic analysis is at stake when one finds, for example, that certain linguistic formations and statements, which would be perfectly acceptable if an erroneous conception were true, are, in fact, excluded. For example, if the thesis that truth exists solely in judgments produced by the human mind were true, many significant statements (such as "he discovered the truth") would not make sense anymore. Other absurd statements forbidden by any linguistic sensibility (such as: "Aristotle produced the truth about being") would have to be regarded as perfectly sensible. Perhaps it is here,

above all, that Wittgenstein's rather confusing notion of the "depth-grammar" ("*Tiefengrammatik*") of language takes on its most authentic meaning.

Very different are the lessons the philosopher can learn through reflection on the syntactic forms of construction of sentences and on various other dimensions of language. In this way, Aristotle arrived in the first chapter of his *Categories* at the metaphysical discovery of substance by considering words (nouns) that other words cannot predicate. This purely linguistic observation may lead a philosopher to recognize that the beings meant by such nouns are often not predicable of other things *because they stand in themselves in being* and *do not inhere in any other subject.* Such analyses do not constitute the proper task of a philosophy of language (which has the task of reflecting philosophically on the essence and elements of language) but of a philosophy inspired by the logos, the laws, the concrete wealth of languages, and their specific relationship to things.

Despite the tremendous fertility of language for philosophy, it ought to be stressed that any *reduction* of philosophy to linguistic analysis, in any sense of this term, is untenable. For philosophers, particularly phenomenologists, the goal is not the investigation of linguistic meanings and ways of conceiving things through "language-games." His is not the task of determining whether or not a particular "language-game" is being played or not. Rather, linguistic analysis is, for the phenomenological philosopher, a *means* he uses to elucidate either the very essence of language and its meaning or the "things themselves," referred to by language and the differences between them. Considering linguistic meanings would only lead to knowing "what men think about things." In contrast, as Aquinas put it, it is the philosopher's task to explore the "*veritas rerum*," the truth of things themselves. Moreover, the conceptual distinctions that clarify ambiguous terms and lead us beyond language to further insight into objective differences between things can ultimately be understood only when one looks beyond conceptual meanings at the different realities and data to which these refer. More importantly, only a return to 'things themselves' is philosophy. In addition, however, knowledge of the data themselves is precisely the *only solid basis* for linguistic analysis because a purely "immanent" linguistic analysis that prescinds from any consideration of the "things themselves" is, philosophically speaking, fruitless and even, in the final analysis, impossible.[4]

This notwithstanding, it is indeed possible to explore with mastership what Wittgenstein called 'language-games' without philosophizing. Even a computer could, in principle, perform functions that allow us to know which combinations of words are actually used in a language, which other words are offered in explanation of a given term, and so forth. However, such an account of the purely linguistic rules and combinations of semantic and syntactic structures has nothing to do with philosophy, not even understanding language's meaning. As soon as we consider the specific *meaning function* of language and the conceptual meanings and meaning units found in a concrete language, we are forced back into consideration of the "things about which language speaks."[5] The very

[4] See on this also my "Texts and Things", in: *Annual ACPA Proceedings* (1999), Vol. LXXII, 41-68.

[5] See Balduin Schwarz, *The Role of Linguistic Analysis* (Washington DC, 1960). Also contained in *Das Problem des Irrtums in der Philosophie* (Münster, Aschaffenburg, 1934); Josef Seifert, Stephen D. Schwarz und Wolfram Schrems (Ed.), Balduin Schwarz, *Der*

meanings of terms are ultimately intelligible only in terms of the things themselves, which are meant by concepts or at least only in terms of the things as projected by the medium of conceptual meanings. [6] In *De Magistro* Chapter 2, Augustine raises the question which is decisive in this context. Speaking to his son Adeodatus, his partner in the dialogue, Augustine writes:

> *... surely, you readily observe that you have expounded words with words, signs with signs, things well known by means of things likewise well-known. I wish, however, that you would show me, if you can, the things themselves of which these are signs.*

In the long and subtle ensuing discussion in the same dialogue, Augustine and Adeodatus arrive at the insight into the need to transcend the whole level of language and even understand the meaning of words to go back to a more direct experience of reality and contact with it.

> *A.: You seek the things, however, which, whatever they are, are surely not words, and yet you also ask me about them by means of words. (Ibid., Chapter 3)*

Augustine gives the telling example of a wall or of material and sensible objects, which are present and at which we may hint. Augustine points out that the pantomime can go beyond what other signs and forms of pointing to things can do. Nevertheless, it is also true here that:

> *whatever bodily movement the pantomimic actor may use in order to show me the thing signified by the word, the motion will not be the thing itself but a sign. (Ibid., Chapter 3)*

Another form of pointing to things, discerned by Augustine, consists of reproducing or doing the "thing" referred to by language. In this way, one could explain the meaning of "dicere" (to speak) by actually performing the speaking activity.

Augustine's investigations into the relationship between language and things and the various forms of communication through signs culminate in insights very similar to those which we have reached and expressed above:

> *For we do not learn the words which we know, nor can we say that we learn those which we do not know unless their signification has been perceived: and this happens not by means of hearing words which are pronounced, but by means of a cognition of the things which are signified. (Ibid., Chapter 11)*

Irrtum in der Philosophie. 2e Aufl., (Unveränderter Neudruck der ersten Aufl., mit einer neuen Einleitung der Herausgeber, drei späteren Aufsätzen von Balduin Schwarz zum Irrtumsproblem und Schriften Nicolai Hartmanns und Josef Seiferts über das Buch von Schwarz). *Realistische Phänomenologische Philosophie.* Philosophische Studien des Dietrich von Hildebrand Lehrstuhls an der Internationalen Akademie für Philosophie – Instituto de Filosofía Edith Stein Granada. Hrsg. Josef Seifert. Bd. III. Kindle Independent Publishing, 2015. http://www.amazon.com/dp/B015GHM4OQ.

[6] See Josef Seifert, *Erkenntnis objektiver Wahrheit*, Part I, Chapter 3.

That this fact applies most of all to philosophical knowledge when it reaches some necessary (eternal) truth is again forcefully stated by St. Augustine in words that seem both to anticipate and explain the true meaning of Husserl's maxim: "Back to things themselves."

> *If he (the pupil) does learn, he learns by means of the things themselves and from his own senses, but not through the articulated words. ... Indeed, when things are discussed which are perceived through the mind, that is, by means of intellect and reason, these are said to be things which we see immediately in that interior light of truth by virtue of which he himself who is called the 'interior man' is illumined, and upon this depends his joy. But then our hearer, if he also himself sees these things with his inner and pure eye, knows that of which I speak by means of his own contemplation, but not through my words. (Ibid., Chapter 12)*

Scientific studies, and especially philosophical ones, would be impossible without going beyond the interpretation of texts and meanings of linguistic formations. Moreover, the going beyond texts and words on the part of the pupil, as Augustine keenly notices, does not proceed to the mind and thought of the teacher (as a psychologistic misunderstanding would have it) but primarily to "things themselves":

> *For who is so stupidly curious as to send his son to school in order that he might learn what the teacher thinks? But all those sciences which they profess to teach, and the science of virtue itself and wisdom, teachers explain through words. Then those who are called pupils consider within themselves whether what has been explained has been said truly; looking of course to that interior truth, according to the measure of which each is able. Thus they learn, and when the interior truth makes known to them what true things have been said, they applaud, but without knowing that instead of applauding teachers they are applauding learners, if indeed their teachers know what they are saying ... (Ibid., Chapter 12)*

Nor is the philosopher interested in things only to the extent this is necessary to understand language, word meanings, and meaning-units and -relations. It would perhaps be the case for the philologist or the language analyst. The philosopher and phenomenological thinker who wants to go 'back to things themselves' will never engage in linguistic analysis for its own sake and for the sake of knowing how languages actually conceive of things. Even less will he analyze things only for the sake of linguistic analysis. While he will consider the essence of language an authentic object (among many others) of philosophical knowledge, he will never accept an immanent conceptual analysis of word meanings and their interrelations and relations with the world as a substitute for philosophical knowledge. Nor will he consider it the only safe way to venture philosophical opinions about reality. On the contrary, he will be convinced that language analysis must be buttressed by criticism of misleading and even erroneous linguistic patterns, habits, or errors incorporated in idiomatic expressions and linguistic formations.

The need to go back to the things themselves about which language speaks and which clearly differ from it does not apply only and clearly to the case in

which the distinction of different things meant by the same term demonstrates the ambiguity and questionable character of word usage. It also applies, nay especially, to the positive case in which the analysis of linguistic formations, manifold meanings of the same terms, or idiomatic expressions is a positive inspiration for the phenomenologist and uncovers important differences within being. For in order to appropriate to oneself the wisdom embodied in language, it is necessary to follow the lead of language and to trace the way back to the things about which linguistic meanings "speak." Only then can language be philosophically 'deciphered,' so to speak. Only then can the often tremendously differentiated, natural knowledge and wisdom bestowed by generations of sensibility and common sense, which gave rise to languages, lead to philosophical knowledge.

Most great philosophers of the past and present applied linguistic analysis in this sense and were "students of language." A phenomenological exploration of the given itself does not in any way contradict the value of linguistic analysis in the classical sense expounded so well by Augustine. It will thus no longer surprise us to find good and brilliant examples of linguistic analysis in phenomenological treatises. In fact, even those found in analytical philosophers are due to their actual going back to things themselves in all the real differences found among them.